

## **Acquisitions improve recreation**

**By Steve Polston**

Fields planted in prairie grass, rushing streams and creeks, hardwood forests, new trails and bridges, nature centers. These are things you can find at properties acquired, purchased and protected by the Indiana Heritage Trust.

One place has all that: McCloud Nature Park, operated by the Hendricks County parks department.

The remarkable land acquisition through a bargain sale by Kay Koch and Brian Molloy occurred in 2000 shortly after the county formed a park board.

Added since the purchase, a 1-mile entrance road, more than 2 miles of trails, and a nature center make enjoying nature possible.

The 11-year-old Indiana Heritage Trust has purchased and protected more than 33,000 acres for recreation and wildlife. Some land is bought outright by the Trust; some in partnership with other conservation organizations; some with money from federal, county or local governments; and some by bargain sale when owners donate profit toward the purchase price.

Indiana Heritage Trust preserves, protects and enhances important and fragile natural areas by acquiring land for habitat, endangered species, recreation and archaeological preservation.

The Indiana Heritage Trust has had many successes in purchasing and protecting land; the Trust and partners have raised \$60 million and completed more than 250 projects ([www.enviroplate.IN.gov](http://www.enviroplate.IN.gov)).

Sources of money include sale of environmental license plates, land conservation groups, private citizens, corporations, and many governmental programs. In the past, the General Assembly appropriated money.

The leverage factor is what makes the Trust successful and potent, now more than ever, according to John Goss, DNR director.

“The ability to bring people together and develop partnerships is one of the great strengths of the Heritage Trust,” DNR Director John Goss said.

“Land protection proposals often come from private land trusts and local government. These groups, including the Heritage Trust, usually do not have all the funds needed to purchase and protect an important natural area. So we partner together, using a variety of funding sources to share the cost of purchasing land.

“That is how we are able to stretch our financial resources, even when the national economy isn’t firing on all cylinders,” Goss said.

In 2003, nearly 1,000 acres were added to the trust. This land will be protected forever. Many other improvements have happened at Trust properties, such as the former Elkhart city dump, which often caught fire, spreading smoke across neighborhoods.

But the dump became an environmental learning, discovery and demonstration center in 1993. Trails at the Elkhart Environmental Center lead past the Elkhart River, wetlands retain run-off, and an engaging made-from-recyclables sculptural creation can sometimes dominate the scenery.

*Recyclosauras Rex* was made partially from materials found at the dump, and is a good example of how trash literally has become a treasure for Elkhart.

Open daily from dawn to dusk, the trails meander past a pond, wetlands, the river and woods. A nature center has programming throughout the year, but is open less often in winter.

Heritage Trust acquisitions frequently are used to enhance state reservoirs, parks, forests and nature preserves, and fish and wildlife areas.

At Scott County's Hardy Lake, a 69-acre acquisition across the road from state property joins other IHT purchases. Together, land purchases around the lake will help protect it from harmful development and encroaching cities.

Which is just fine to Brian Heredos, of Indianapolis, who camped and fished at Hardy Lake in August.

"It was almost too hot for camping and fishing, but I'd come back," said the angler, who showed off a big, green bass he caught fishing among the lily pads. Many anglers do come back, even in winter, and fish through ice for bluegill and crappie.

Working the shores of Hardy Lake can pay off in the sighting of owls, greenbacked herons, great blue herons, and other waterfowl.

"When we can protect habitat near DNR properties, we can protect the species that depend on the habitat," said Eric Myers, executive director of the Trust.

#### Indiana Heritage Trust Projects Completed in 2003 Acreage protected in 2003 — 1078.8

- Project 119

2.4 acres, Lake County, Hoosier Prairie Nature Preserve

This addition to the preserve consists of the back portions of private property, which will assist in conducting prescribed burns to maintain various stages of plant succession.

- Project 187

86.7 acres, Marion County, Cotton Lake

This property along the White River adjoins the south boundary of Southwestway Regional Park and contains 28 acres of natural oxbow lakes and wetlands, four acres of wooded riverine wetlands, 34 acres of tillable ground and 22 acres of woodlands. This acquisition helps increase recreational acreage.

- Project 192

193.9 acres, Putnam County, Big Walnut Nature Preserve

This tract contains a mix of pasture, forest and tillable land, much of which is subject to erosion and potential for development. The protection of this property is provided by a conservation easement providing for soil conservation and forest management plans, and removing the threat of conversion to other uses.

- Project 217

100.4 acres, Owen County, Green's Bluff Nature Preserve

This acquisition features about 70 acres of upland dry-mesic and mesic forest and 35 acres of pasture that will be reforested. The property is adjacent to Raccoon Woods, identified by the Indiana Natural Heritage Program as a high-quality example of an upland ravine forest complex.

- Project 245

233 acres, Spencer County, Little Pigeon Wetland Corridor

This tract is adjacent to the 270-acre Little Pigeon Creek Wetland Conservation Area. It is predominately forested, with numerous buttonbush sloughs and oxbow ponds throughout. The corridor is used extensively by wildlife, including wild turkey and deer, and is a major migration route for waterfowl and shorebirds in the fall and spring.

- Project 266

130.3 acres, Jasper County, Fisher Oak Savanna Nature Preserve

This parcel contains 95 acres of post oak flat woods with slight elevation changes and some ponded areas. It contains three separate ecological types: Kankakee-type sand and prairie, wet black soil prairie and pin-oak flat woods. The woods consist of black, white and pin-oaks. The understory contains an assortment of ferns and forbs, including blueberry bushes.

- Project 271

28.4 acres, Steuben County, Pokagon State Park

This parcel borders Pokagon State Park on two sides and has frontage on State Road 127. It is mostly rolling hills and upland forest. A ravine on the north border is quite steep.

- Project 277

303.7 acres, Warrick County, Blue Grass Fish and Wildlife Area

The fourth of five total tracts in the new 2,532-acre fish and wildlife area; it contains farmland, water and reclaimed mineland.

## **Kankakee Sands Update**

The Nature Conservancy began in 1996 to restore and connect hundreds of acres of isolated remnants of Indiana prairie, wetland and savanna areas. The 7,200-acre Kankakee Sands Restoration connects surrounding pieces of the Kankakee Grand Marsh that once covered hundreds of thousands of acres in northern Indiana and Illinois.

The Newton County area connects Conrad Savanna, Conrad Station Savanna and Beaver Lake Nature Preserve. Conrad was a small town near Beaver Lake, a shallow, marsh lake 7 miles wide and 4 miles long drained in the late 1800s.

A 120-acre seed nursery, and seed processing facility are on the property. Indian grass and native star are two of about 93 different native species that have been carefully tended and restored.

The nursery produces enough seed to replant 600 acres in native plants a year and to restore the original bio-diversity.

The plantings have increased wildlife habitat, especially for migratory waterfowl. A bird watching paradise, it has been a good place to see nesting black rails and Wilson's phalarope.

Kankakee Sands project office is located on US 41 between CR 225N and CR 400N in Newton County. More information, 219-285-2184.